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Background

The research findings presented here are part of a three year ESRC Case studentship entitled "Space, place and volunteers: the nature, meaning and impact of volunteering in Scotland". The studentship is based in the Department of Geography at the University of Dundee with Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS) the non-academic partner organisation. The findings, focussing on the nature of volunteering in Scotland, are the first of three to be published by VDS.

This research uses both qualitative (in depth interviews) and quantitative methods (self completion postal questionnaires) to gather data from current, former and non volunteers in four case study sites in Scotland: Sandy Isles (a deprived rural community), Lochlands (and affluent rural community), Parkville (an affluent urban community) and Towerton (a deprived urban community). Fieldwork was carried out in the period June 2004 – June 2005.

Main Findings

- The percentage of the population currently volunteering is higher in rural communities than urban communities
- Affluent individuals are more likely to volunteer than less affluent individuals
- However, there is no statistically significant relationship between the affluence or deprivation of an area and the percentage of people within it who volunteer.
- There is a significant spatial variation in the intensity of volunteering:
 - in rural communities volunteering can be characterised as broad i.e. multiple organisations / fewer hours
 - in urban communities volunteering can be characterised as deep i.e. fewer organisations / multiple hours
 - in deprived communities volunteering can be characterised as routine i.e. multiple organisations / regular basis
 - in affluent communities volunteering can be characterised as diffuse i.e. fewer organisations / less frequent basis

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Findings

An overview of Scotland's volunteers

Twenty three percent of the overall population surveyed in this research were volunteers.¹ When combining data on current volunteers with those who had volunteered in the past 12 months but were no longer doing so this increased to 28.3%. This is slightly higher than the most recent Scottish Household Survey (SHS) result of 23% (Martin et al, 2005:146) but lower than the 38% identified by VDS' own research in 2004 (2004:4).² Table 1 summarises the key characteristics found to be statistically significant with regard to whether or not an adult in Scotland is likely to be currently volunteering.

Table 1. Current volunteers: significant characteristics of volunteers in Scotland

Characteristic	Base	Sig.*	Detail
Rural or urban location	n=509	99.9% p=0.000	In rural areas 31.8% of the population are current volunteers, in urban areas 14.8%
Age	n=502	95% p=0.032	Volunteering is highest among those aged 35 – 44 yrs (32%) followed by those aged 55-59 (31.5%) and those aged 45 – 54 (27.6%). It is lowest among those aged 60-64 (12.8%)
Social economic class (SEC)	n=435	99% p=0.005	Volunteering is highest among managerial and professional workers (30%) and lowest among semi-routine and routine occupations (11.5%). The percentage of volunteers decreases as SEC lowers
Educational achievement level	n=495	95% p=0.035	Volunteering is highest among those with a degree (31%) and lowest among those who have no educational achievement (10.8%)
Dependent children	n=492	95% p=0.027	Among those with dependent children 30% were current volunteers. Among those without 20.8%
Access to more than one vehicle	n=494	99% p=0.007	Volunteering is highest among those with access to 3 or more vehicles (31%) and lowest among those with access to no vehicles (15.4%)

*Confidence intervals given at 90%, 95%, 99% and 99.9% level. The higher the confidence interval the greater the relationship between the two variables

There was no statistically significant relationship between being a volunteer and gender, being in any form of employment (full time or part time) or being specifically in full time employment. These results echo a number of earlier VDS findings: VDS identified the percentage of those volunteering to be highest among the highest SEC and lowest among the lowest (53% among SEC AB and 26% among SEC DE), little difference in volunteering between men and women (39% of women, 37% of men) and volunteering to be highest among those aged 35 –44 and 45 – 54 (44%) (2004:4). SHS data also reveals gender to make little impact

¹ In this research only those volunteering at the time of the fieldwork were classified as "volunteers". Those who had volunteered within the past twelve months but were not currently doing so were classified "former volunteers" along with respondents who had any previous experience of volunteering. Non-volunteers were those who had never volunteered.

² It should be noted that data collection methods in these three surveys are different. This research captures data only on volunteers aged 18 and over while SHS and VDS research covers those aged 16+. Additionally while VDS use show cards of volunteering activity this research used a self completion questionnaire offering a definition of volunteering and asking "Are you currently a volunteer?", "Have you been a volunteer in the past 12 months?" and "Have you ever been a volunteer?". SHS ask respondents to identify whether they have given any unpaid time to help any clubs, charities, campaigns or organisations

(25% of women and 22% of men had volunteered in the past 12 months) and those aged 35 – 44 were most likely to have been a volunteer in that period (28%) followed by those aged 45 – 59 (26%) (Martin et al, 2005:146).

How many volunteers or how much volunteering?

The figures above refer specifically to the proportion of the population involved in volunteering and this type of data is routinely used as a measure of volunteering by SHS, VDS and the Home Office. While this data is useful it does not offer any insight into the intensity of volunteering in particular communities as *numbers of volunteers* rather than *levels of volunteering* are reported. In contrast the remaining results presented here report not just on whether or not someone is a volunteer but also consider in detail the level of volunteering i.e. the frequency of their volunteering, average weekly hours spent volunteering and the number of organisations with which they volunteer.

Urban and rural variations: broad and deep volunteering

Table 2 highlights the key differences between numbers of volunteers *and* levels of volunteering in urban and rural communities.

Table 2. Current volunteers: key urban and rural variations

Characteristic	Base	Sig.*	Detail
The proportion of residents currently volunteering is higher in rural areas	n=509	99.9% p=0.001	31.8% of rural residents and 14.8% of urban residents are current volunteers
Rural volunteers are more likely to be actively volunteering with more than one organisation	n=113	99% p=0.017	54.5% of rural volunteers and 30.6% of urban volunteers are active with more than one organisation
Urban volunteers are more likely to volunteer in excess of four hours per week	n=110	90% p=0.055	33.3% of urban volunteers and 12.2% of rural volunteers are active for more than four hours in an average week
No statistically significant relationship exists between urban/rural location and frequency of volunteering	n=114	p=0.258	45.5% of rural volunteers and 56.8% of urban volunteers volunteer less than once a week and 56.8% of rural and 43.2% of urban volunteers volunteer at least once a week

*Confidence intervals given at 90%, 95%, 99% and 99.9% level. The higher the confidence interval the greater the relationship between the two variables

What emerges here is a picture of rural volunteering which can largely be characterised as *broad* and a picture of urban volunteering which can largely be characterised as *deep*: rural volunteers are more likely to exist and more likely to be involved with multiple organisations but their involvement is less likely to be for more than four hours per week. This multiple organisation/fewer hours volunteering is in contrast to the fewer organisations/multiple hours volunteering more characteristic of urban volunteers. The fact that there is no statistically significant relationship between the average frequency of volunteering over the past 12 months in rural and urban sites adds weight to this broad and deep characterisation: if rural volunteers had been active in more weeks of the year than urban volunteers it may have been possible to argue that the higher average weekly hour commitment from urban volunteers is less significant – rural volunteers do less each week but they do it in more weeks, for example. This does not, however, seem to be the case: without a statistically significant difference in this area evidence for the broad and deep variation is stronger still.

This characterisation of rural volunteering as “broad” and urban volunteering as “deep” may lead us to reconsider existing work which argues for the particular susceptibility of rural volunteers to “volunteer burnout” (Shucksmith and Philip, 2000 and Yates and Jochum, 2003). It could be argued that very intense involvement with just one organisation could be as demanding, or even more demanding, than less hours spent across a variety of organisations.

Affluent and deprived variations: routine and diffuse volunteering

Table 3 highlights the key differences between numbers of volunteers *and* levels of volunteering in affluent and deprived communities.

Table 3. Current volunteers: key affluent and deprived variations

Characteristic	Base	Sig.	Detail
No statistically significant relationship between affluent or deprived location and the proportion of residents currently volunteering ³	n=509	p=0.274	24.6% of residents in affluent locations and 20.4% of residents in deprived locations are current volunteers
Volunteers in deprived areas are more likely to be actively volunteering with more than one organisation	n=113	p=0.096	57.9% of volunteers in deprived locations and 41.3% of volunteers in affluent locations are active with more than one organisation
No statistically significant relationship between affluent/deprived location and average weekly hours spent volunteering	n=110	n=0.771	17.8% of volunteers in affluent locations and 21.6% of volunteers in deprived locations are active for more than four hours in an average week
Volunteers in deprived locations are more likely to volunteer at least once a week	n=114	p=0.034	63.2% of volunteers in deprived locations and 42.1% of volunteers in affluent locations volunteer at least once a week

Here we see a different kind of spatial variation with the multiple organisation/regular basis volunteering of deprived areas best characterised as *routine* and the fewer organisations/less frequent volunteering of affluent locations best characterised as *diffuse*. However, with no difference in the average weekly hours individuals in each location spend volunteering it is clear that volunteers in affluent locations must spend more time per visit than their deprived counterparts in each organisation with which they are active. Again this raises interesting questions about how these different kinds of volunteering are experienced by volunteers and the impact on their own lives and that of their communities.

By reviewing data on both the percentage of a population engaged in volunteering and the intensity of that volunteering these findings add to the existing body of knowledge on geographical variation in volunteering. The impact of these different types of volunteering, both on individuals and communities, will be considered in future Research Findings publications.

³ These results refer to the affluence or deprivation of the case study *area* (as identified by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) and not the characteristics of the *individual respondent*. Data on the SEC of individual respondents is shown in Table 1.

References

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